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**NHTSA 59-92**  
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## **NHTSA REJECTS CLAIM THAT MILLIONS OF SAFETY BELT BUCKLES ARE DEFECTIVE**

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) today announced that an exhaustive investigation found absolutely no basis for an allegation that tens of millions of seat belt buckles were defective.

The safety agency said it has denied a petition by the Institute for Injury Reduction (IIR) calling for a safety recall and rulemaking to deal with the alleged defect.

NHTSA Administrator Marion C. Blakey said that IIR, an organization founded by plaintiffs' attorneys, suggested that a particular belt buckle design is "unsafe" and could unlatch during a crash. The CBS show "Street Stories" and the CBS Evening News featured news stories based on that false allegation.

"The agency reviewed thousands of crash tests, conducted laboratory testing, analyzed real-world accident data, reviewed complaints to the agency's Auto Safety Hotline, requested and reviewed information from vehicle and belt manufacturers, and even obtained information from other countries. The results are consistent: current safety belts are safe. There is no need for a recall or new regulations. Safety belts provide outstanding crash protection, and the public should ignore irresponsible reports to the contrary," Blakey said.

The administrator said that "inertial" unlatching of a belt buckle -- caused by a sharp blow to the back of the buckle that can jar the latch loose from the tongue of the belt -- is not a phenomenon associated with real world crashes.

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"For more than 25 years NHTSA engineers have been identifying defects in motor vehicles and motor vehicle equipment. When there has been a legitimate complaint about a vehicle safety belt, NHTSA has moved swiftly to force a recall. In just the past four years, there have been 10 safety belt buckle recalls involving manufacturing defects in 2.72 million vehicles. None of these problems related to the petition's alleged defect," Blakey added.

NHTSA's comprehensive analysis cost \$100,000, and delayed rulemaking and enforcement activities. During the review of the petition, NHTSA:

- o Conducted vehicle and laboratory testing at NHTSA's test center in Ohio.
- o Reviewed real-world crash records and laboratory crash data.
- o Contacted persons listed in the Office of Defects Investigation complaint files for additional information on safety belt performance.
- o Obtained and analyzed detailed information from eight motor vehicle manufacturers world-wide.
- o Analyzed design data from five belt manufacturers and seven belt buckle patent holders.
- o Contacted Canada and Australia for relevant investigations.

Canada has conducted many investigations into alleged release of buckles but has never found buckle release to be caused by the problem alleged by IIR. In their response to NHTSA, Transport Canada noted, "Scare stories of this nature can undo many years of work in building public confidence in occupant restraint systems."

The administrator emphasized that safety belts are the most effective safety device in a motor vehicle and should always be worn. She reiterated the agency's confidence that belts can be expected to protect the motoring public.

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